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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 004768

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2016
TAGS: [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: COGAT'S EFFORTS TO RESOLVE AMCIT VISA DIFFICULTIES
IN THE WEST BANK

REF: A) TEL AVIV 4580 B) JERUSALEM 4865 C) JERUSALEM

4693 D) TEL AVIV 4398 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones; Reasons 1.4 (B and D).

11. (C) Summary: Senior EmbOffs met December 7 with MG Yossef Mishlev (GOI Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories - COGAT) to stress the urgent need for Israel to resolve the visa problems facing American citizens seeking to live and work in the West Bank. They requested that the GOI provide clear and consistent guidance on its visa policy, including a written list of visa categories and schedule of visa validity, to allow the USG to better inform its citizens. Mishlev confirmed that he had assumed responsibility for the issue within the GOI and acknowledged that it had affected bilateral U.S.-Israeli relations. He described his ongoing efforts to resolve it, including a return to many aspects of the previous visa system for foreigners, as well as some improvements. He asked the Embassy to pass details of any problem cases to facilitate rapid GOI action on their visas. End summary.

GOI Understands Importance of Resolving the Visa Issue

12. (C) PolCouns, EconCouns, and Deputy Consul General stressed the importance of expeditiously resolving problems faced by some American citizens attempting to enter -- or renew their visas for -- the West Bank. PolCouns stressed that the issue had become an irritant in the bilateral relationship. CA A/S Harty had recently discussed its importance with the Israeli DCM in Washington. Mishlev assured emboffs that he is "very aware of the problem" and is actively engaged in finding a solution.

13. (C) The Deputy ConGen explained the State Department's role in assisting American citizens abroad. He questioned the purpose of a visa regime which prohibits AmCits from providing valuable medical, NGO, and educational services -- or from visiting close relatives -- in the West Bank. Emboffs requested that the GOI provide clear and consistent guidance on its visa policy, including a written list of visa categories and schedule of visa validity, to allow the USG to better inform its citizens. Mishlev agreed to do so after he completes consultations with the MFA and MOI.

COGAT Can Once Again Renew Visas Inside the West Bank;
GOI Working on Visa Categories/Validity Issues

14. (C) Mishlev said he had met with the Minister of Interior and obtained authority for COGAT to renew visas in the West Bank (i.e., without traveling abroad) for foreigners as it had done prior to the recent change in policy. He asked the Embassy to immediately pass his assistant details of any

problems involving AmCits and pledged to resolve them immediately, as he said he would do for lists already received by the MOD.

¶5. (C) According to Mishlev, the GOI still needs to develop procedures for different categories of visitors (investors, tourists, NGO workers, etc.) and the length of stay that each could be granted. He requested suggestions from the Embassy. He explained that visas cannot be extended past 27 months, and even then they must be renewed repeatedly within this period. He could issue "visitor permits" to allow for longer stays however. Complaining that an originally flawed system had left 60,000 people residing illegally in the West Bank, he expressed the view that foreigners who come to remain with their families should obtain a Palestinian ID card. He admitted that this procedure is difficult, because the GOI does not deal with the Hamas-led offices in the Palestinian Authority.

¶6. (C) Mishlev pledged to facilitate the stay of individuals who are assisting U.S. efforts to improve the quality of life in the West Bank, including NGO workers, contractors, and -- most importantly -- investors. He noted that tourists would still have to obtain a visa from the Interior Ministry and would be unable to renew their status through COGAT. Efforts are underway to assign a COGAT officer to Ben Gurion airport to help resolve any difficulties for arriving AmCits intending to reside or work in the West Bank.

¶7. (C) Comment: While the USG has Mishlev's commitment to improve the visa process, the first real test of these procedures will occur when the Embassy submits the names of AmCits who have experienced problems. We are gathering this information now and expect to provide it to COGAT early next week. End comment.

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¶8. (U) Septel reports Mishlev's comments on Agreement on Movement and Access issues.

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JONES